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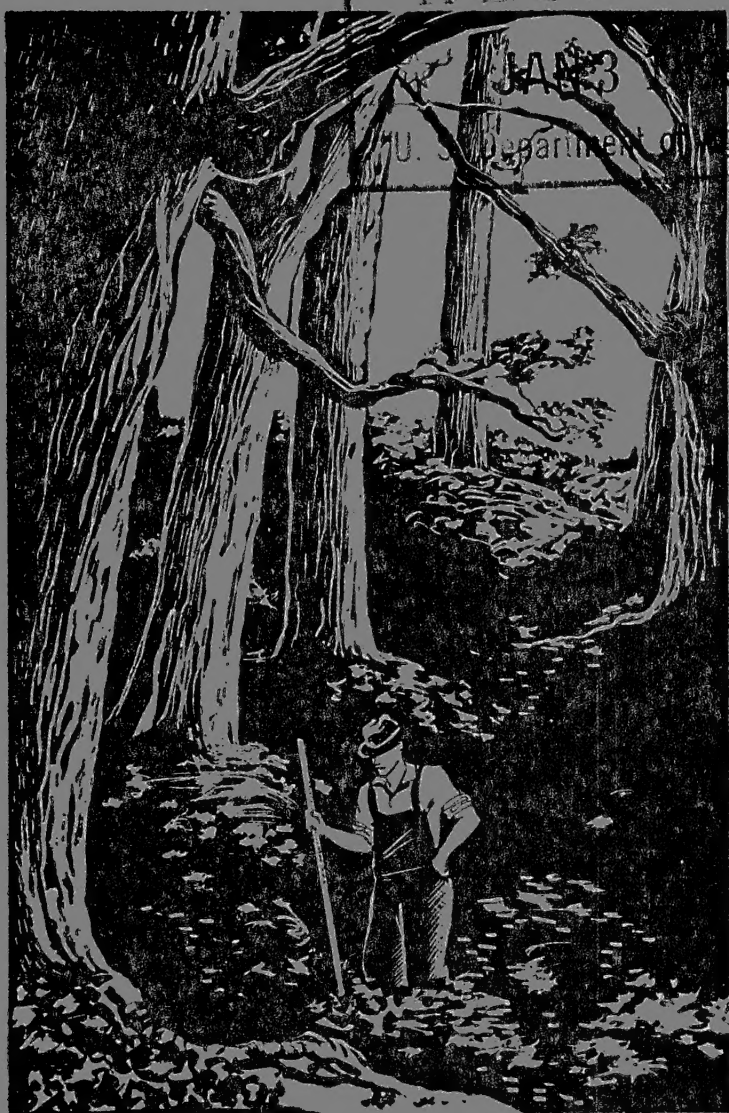
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OAK

LEAFMOLD

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JAN 3 1952 ★  
U. S. Department of Agriculture

BY  
EARLE DILATUSH



*The best material in the World for Holly and many Native Plants*



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# OAK LEAFMOLD



This is the story of a product that has done more than anything else to make the growing of Holly possible over almost all of the United States. Its use has exploded like an atom bomb the many and varied "you cannot grow it" myths handed down to us through the ages. I learned about the use of Oak Leafmold not so much from books as from years of hard work in real dirt farming with Hollies. I have always been glad I first started to grow Holly and other wild plants as a hobby, not as a commercial venture, because I spent years of hard work and much money before I learned how to successfully handle them. The first plants I transplanted were set out in our own woods. Father and mother would not be bothered with things such a little fellow wanted about the yard. There were more important flowers and trees. But some of those little trees, planted in such a crude way, are alive today, while hundreds of better, bigger plants on which I later spent much money and time proved miserable failures.

## **BORN ON A FARM**

I have lived all my life on the farm where I was born. My father was a good farmer, but his greatest interest in life was in fertilizers. During my early childhood his bone mill on the farm was known to every farmer for miles around. There were no commercial fertilizers in those days, but manure, supplemented by ground bone from my father's mill, helped make this part of New Jersey known far and wide as the cream of farm lands.

The happiest days of my childhood were spent in this mill. As I grew up commercial fertilizers were developed and I helped mix by hand hundreds of tons. When my father died, he was president of a large fertilizer firm; my twin brother carries on in his place.

## **FATHER'S FAITH IN FERTILIZERS**

My father believed in advertising and used much ground bone and later, commercial fertilizers, on the farm. The crops we grew helped no little to sell our fertilizers. My mother was in full accord with us. Few farm women could boast of such beautiful flowers around the yard and in the house. She always gave our fertilizer credit, but not fully

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warranted, because much of the material used in her pots, porch boxes, etc., was stump dirt, as she called it. This was rotted wood from stumps and logs, together with rotted leaves. I used to get it for her as a child with a wheelbarrow little larger than a toy.

When I began growing Holly and other natives, my greatest handicap was this experience with fertilizers and the belief I shared with my father that they would help any plant. The first few years were full of disappointments. I took time to bring in many natives when father thought I ought to have been in the cornfield, or orchards. The fact that these became sickly looking as the months went by did not make it easier for me.

### **LEARNED BY EXPERIENCE**

However, I persisted and learned as I went along. For instance, Hollies planted around our ice house, where sawdust used for keeping ice was discarded every few years, were the first to grow really well. Since that time, I have used over 2,000 tons of Old Oak Sawdust. After much persuasion, my father, who did not want me to use good cultivated farm land for Hollies, consented to my using, in one of the best of our fields, a portion that had been cleared only two years, and on which a crop of corn had been poor—the ground was too sour. The whole field was plowed at one time and I planted the new portion in Hollies. It happened that some were put in the older ground. Before the year was over, the Hollies showed clearly the line where the old field ended and the results were the opposite of the corn crop.

This and many other things finally convinced me that I was working backwards with Holly, and success came with a rush when I stopped the use of chemical fertilizers and planted my Hollies in pure Oak Leafmold. Father did not deliver in those days, for there were no trucks. However, farmers often drove fifty miles or more to get our fertilizers. My hollies were planted in full view of all who drove in and some, who took pride in planting their home grounds, added a Holly or two to their loads. Thus a hobby turned into a business. But what a job it was to persuade those farmers that the fertilizer they had just bought for their farm crops would work adversely on their Hollies!

All this happened over forty years ago and since then great advances have been made in Holly growing. Better stock has been developed and most Hollies are now sold by name. Nothing, though,

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has done so much for Hollies as the use of Oak Leafmold. The planting directions we give are most simple — use lots of Oak Leafmold and do not forget water; let cost be your only guide for you can hardly use too much.

I have shipped many Hollies to Minnesota, Wisconsin, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Canada, and Nova Scotia; planted in Oak Leafmold almost all are doing well. This proves latitude is not the barrier it has always been thought to be. Altitude, too, has been overcome since Hollies are now established in the Poconos, Catskills, Adirondacks, and Green Mountains. In fact they are growing most everywhere. To sum it all up, Holly has few of the faults credited to it, but is very particular as to soil conditions and will often die rather than get used to man made soil. However, the whole trouble is usually very easily corrected. The “secret” is the generous use of Oak Leafmold when transplanting. This helps make conditions “natural” when we place Holly around our homes. Success is hard to secure without it.

### **LEAFMOLD DIFFERS FROM PEATMOSS**

Nor should we overlook the insulating value of Oak Leafmold as it greatly cuts down the depth penetration of frost. When you figure that ground in an open field will freeze 18 inches, and the same cold penetrates only 3 inches in the forest floor, you can begin to see what I mean. Of no less value is the effect produced in summer. Heat penetrating ordinary soil will kill many Holly rootlets for which dry weather is blamed. Oak Leafmold is a valuable insulating blanket winter or summer.

I cannot express it in technical terms, but the real value of Oak Leafmold comes from its being “alive”. We gather it from upland woods where it is from 4 to 10 inches thick, with the top leaves only a few years old while the bottom layers have remained for decades. The whole mass comes in varying degrees of decomposition. Regardless of how long it has remained in the woods, it has been impregnated day by day with light and air. Every bushel of Oak Leafmold that is gathered from the floor of the woods has in it thousands of minute growing rootlets of plants and trees. The fact that this material has ripened in light and air cannot be over-emphasized.

In great contrast are the peat mosses and other forms of humus which, while they hold the moisture as does Oak Leafmold, cannot feed our plants be-

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cause they are "locked". Lying for centuries without benefit of light or air, they develop a set condition that is very hard to break down. It is months after these are put in the ground before decomposition, so necessary to make conditions right, occurs. When you get Oak Leafmold, it is alive with this helpful bacteria which releases nitrogen, phosphorus and potash over a long period so that it wears well and feeds plants for several years. Chemical fertilizers, minus this bacteria, give a "lift" to plants but often wear out just when the plant needs food most.

### **LEAFMOLD IS NATURE'S OWN FERTILIZER**

Let's forget the merits of chemical fertilizers versus Oak Leafmold a moment and ponder this fact — Nature grew Hollies with leafmold millions of years before man-made fertilizers, so why is it not logical to use Oak Leafmold rather than man's imitation? All I do is to use more of it around the roots of Holly than is found in Nature. If I could get no more Oak Leafmold, I am afraid I would go out of the Holly business.

On my Holly Farm, we are rooting many thousands of Holly cuttings each year. These are placed in small pots filled with Oak Leafmold. As they grow, the plants are transferred to larger pots, then placed in Nature Packed wire baskets, and on into "wells" in our Holly orchard, where they mature into large specimens. From small pots to and including the "wells", our Hollies grow in pure Oak Leafmold.

But there is a catch in the above procedure. Large Hollies are selling well, and I want to keep on growing a few hundred each year — yet in my Holly orchard are many holes actually dug and waiting for trees that are selling so fast they never find their way to the orchard.

The larger specimen Hollies in our Holly orchard are growing in "wells" filled with Oak Leafmold as mentioned above. We do not cultivate but try to mow the weeds twice a year. During the fall and spring, we scatter over the roots of each Holly a scoop shovel full of a mixture of equal parts of tobacco (dust or crushed stems) and cottonseed meal. Because of considerable loss from mice, we are discontinuing the cottonseed meal and substituting castor pomace. The latter is cheaper and mice really hate it.

Here is something that has often puzzled me. Folks buy Hollies, and find no fault whatsoever with the purchase price; then kick like everything over

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the cost of fertilizer (mostly Oak Leafmold) which will keep the Holly growing on to make the investment worth while.

I believe my son, Tom, now has the answer to this problem. During the winter we have sold many large specimens for spring delivery and planting. Prices are the same as last year, but we now give retail customers the necessary Oak Leafmold without charging for it. However, we do not tell the customer until AFTER the sale is made and the response has been way ahead of anything we expected. I suppose it is the psychology of the thing. The gift represents less than 10% of the cost of the purchase yet many customers seem more pleased than if we had halved the price of the tree and then charged, as formerly, for the leafmold.

### **NATURE PACK BEST METHOD**

"Nature Pack", is a good example of the use of Oak Leafmold. It has unquestionably done more to establish Holly all over the country than anything else. It is very simple but most effective and entirely solves the only major trouble we have ever had with Holly — that of transplanting. You can hardly kill Holly once it gets well rooted in your ground. Under normal conditions, every Holly should live a hundred years.

Now, back to "Nature Pack". We make large wire baskets, line the sides with waterproof special paper, put some Oak Leafmold in the bottom, then place a B&B Holly in the middle, and tuck in with lots of Oak Leafmold. A small handful of cottonseed meal and tobacco is sprinkled on top and the whole thing watered well. The Holly is grown several months — sometimes as long as two years — with the basket sitting on top of the ground.

After buying, the customer plunges the whole package "as is" into the ground and the Holly, already firmly established, does not know it is moved. The rootlets go right through the paper around the sides of the basket and the wires, too, rust away before roots grow large enough to be restricted. Most folks follow our advice and dig a hole larger than the basket; fill in, not with soil, but with pure Oak Leafmold. Planted thus, a Holly will be happy most anywhere in the country.

## **EARLE DILATUSH**

### *Holly Specialist*

**ROUTE 25**

**ROBBINSVILLE, N. J.**

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HOLLY



HEMLOCK



RHODODENDRON



BLUE BERRY



SWAMP MAGNOLIA



ANDROMEDA



FERN



MOCCASIN FLOWER

A FEW OF THE MANY NATIVE PLANTS THAT LIKE  
OAK LEAFMOLD

